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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

April 3, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Berlin

I have started on the problem which the President posed for me, and will report further after my return from Europe about May first. In the meantime, it is essential to establish premises upon which analysis can rest. Those stated below are for study, which has already been requested, in my absence in the Departments of State and Defense.

Tentative Premises for Analysis

1. There is no "solution" for the Berlin problem short of the unification of Germany. All courses of action are dangerous and unpromising. Inaction is even worse. We are faced with a "Hobson's choice." If a crisis is provoked a bold and dangerous course may be the safest.

2. No agreement with the Soviet Union on Berlin is possible which will not weaken the Western position and open the way to early Western elimination from Berlin--except, of course, a wholly unlikely USSR decision to drop the whole issue. A temporary agreement, such as was discussed at Geneva in 1959, by its very time limit would call our basic position in Berlin into question, and merely postpone the crisis to be met under more disadvantageous circumstances. Nor is it probable that the crisis would be long deferred by any concession in the all-German field which we could realistically offer.

3. It seems more likely than not that the USSR will move toward a crisis on Berlin this year.

4. Decisions and preparations to meet this crisis should be made at the earliest possible date.

5. Berlin

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5. Berlin is of great importance. It is more than probable, and approaches certitude, that if the United States accepted a Communist take-over of Berlin—under whatever face-saving and delaying device—the power status in Europe would be starkly revealed and Germany, and probably France, Italy and Benelux, would make the indicated adjustments. The United Kingdom would hope that something would turn up. It wouldn't.

6. If USSR is not to dominate Europe, and, by doing so, dominate Asia and Africa also, a willingness to fight for Berlin is essential. Economic and political pressures will not be effective; they would degrade the credibility of the United States commitment to NATO. Nor would threatening to initiate general nuclear war be a solution. The threat would not carry conviction; it would invite a preemptive strike; and it would alienate allies and neutrals alike. The fight for Berlin must begin, at any rate, as a local conflict. The problem is how and where will it end. This uncertainty must be accepted.

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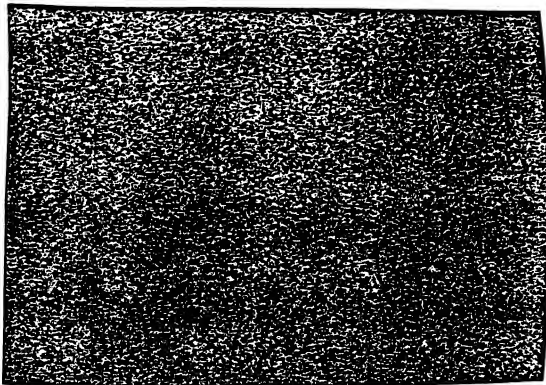
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9. The United States will have the gravest difficulty, as it has had in the past, in getting its allies, including the Germans, to agree in advance to a fight for Berlin. Nevertheless, the United States should proceed with its preparations. These preparations will be apparent to the USSR and will contribute to the deterrent. But they should be consistently played down, e.g., covered as plans for maneuvers. Unless these steps are handled most discreetly, and full consultation on the objective continuously conducted, our allies might become frightened and tempted to make concessions on Berlin, without our agreement, which might amount to its surrender.

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